

CALIFORNIA LITIGATION:

Section Chair's Editorial
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Justice Clinton W. White: Trial Lawyer of the Year
By Teresa Tan

One of the projects in which the Litigation Section takes great pride is the Trial Lawyer of the Year Award. Given every year for the past four years at our Spring Annual Symposium, the award is given to distinguished California trial lawyers who have added to the stature of the profession by their professionalism, integrity, and outstanding trial skills. Past recipients have included Joseph A. Ball (1994), Eugene J. Majeski (1995), and James Brosnahan (1996). This year's recipient, Justice Clinton W. White (ret.) is another illustrious recipient who has been a trailblazer in the profession.

Justice White, a native of Sacramento, was born in 1921. He graduated valedictorian of McClatchey High School, the first black valedictorian in Sacramento. He served in the United States Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1945, and was a Tuskegee air cadet. After the war he received his undergraduate degree from U.C. Berkeley in 1946 and his law degree from Boalt Hall in 1948.

Upon his graduation from law school, there were no legal opportunities for African- American attorneys in mainstream law firms. Instead, Justice White opened his own law firm in a converted residence on Adeline Street in West Oakland and, like many of his colleagues of the time such as former California Supreme Court Justices Wiley Manuel and Allan Broussard and Superior Court Judge John Cruikshank, began to practice in his local community. He would often go into his own pocket to pay the filing fee or post the bail for his client.

Clinton White's commitment to excellence, his restless energy and magnificent court room presence resulted in his achieving a string of courtroom victories. At a very early age he became a legend in the Alameda County Courts. As a criminal defense lawyer, he provided first class legal representation to scores of persons who would otherwise have had only minimal representation or none at all. As a leading trial lawyer, he became General Counsel to the East Bay Chapter of the NAACP. During his tenure as General Counsel, he led the charge toward the integration of the jury pools of Alameda County and throughout the state.

Justice White was known as a fierce trial lawyer. Many of the cases he defended were unpopular from a societal and political perspective. The defense of the Black Muslims charged in the notorious "Zebra" murder trial, the defense of many members of the Black Panther Party and other "militant" organizations, and constitutional challenges to the practices and policies of local police departments and other law enforcement agencies for violations of the civil rights of his clients were all matters that Justice White regularly litigated with great skill and courage.

On February 17, 1977, Justice White was appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. to the Alameda County Superior Court bench. One year later, on April 19, 1978, he was elevated to the post of Justice of California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, again by Governor Brown; becoming one of the first African-Americans on the State Court of Appeal. He was appointed Presiding Justice of the Court of Appeal on May 26, 1978. In addition to his regular legal duties, he served as Associate Justice Pro tempore on the California Supreme Court in 1980. Justice White retired when his term expired on January 2, 1995.

Consistently active in community affairs, Justice White is a member of the NAACP, and served on the Board of Directors of the Citizens Committee for Equal Education Opportunity, Oakland, California. He is also a former Chairman of Men of Tomorrow, Inc., Commissioner of Youth Baseball since 1979, and is a former coach in the Connie Mack Baseball league. Justice White has served on the Boards and committees of a variety of professional associations including: the Alameda County Bar Association, Charles Houston Bar

Association, State Bar of California, and the California Judges Association.

Because of his love of the law, his competitive drive, and his unswerving commitment to his clients' causes, Clinton White brought high quality legal skills to West and East Oakland. He became and is a role model for all trial lawyers. The Litigation Section is privileged to have an opportunity to recognize and honor another distinguished trial lawyer and add Justice White to our Trial Lawyers Hall of Fame.

Ms. Tan, Chair of the Litigation Section, is Senior Counsel with Motorola, Inc.

California Litigation is pleased to review original articles submitted for publication.
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